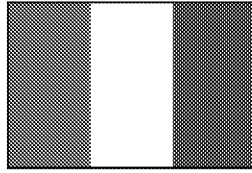


CULTURAL AND ETIQUETTE BACKGROUND

ITALIAN REPUBLIC



OFFICIAL LANGUAGE

Italian

- Over 90 percent of the population speaks Italian as a native language. Italian is the language of national government, national media, and higher education.
- Italian has many regional dialects, which are used primarily in social and family settings. German, French, and Slovene are also spoken locally in the northern regions of Trentino-Alto Adige, Valle d'Aosta, and Trieste-Gorizia.
- Most Italian diplomats speak excellent English. English skills are less common among Italy's elected politicians and the general population, particularly outside large cities.

GENERAL BEHAVIOR

- Italians value care for self-presentation, which is known locally as presenting a *bella figura*. Using traditional modes of address, listening respectfully, complimenting hosts, and dressing on the formal side for most occasions all build credibility with Italian audiences.
- Italian interlocutors can be sensitive about U.S. or other foreign visitors deploying outdated or inaccurate stereotypes and generalizations about Italian culture and history.

ATTIRE

Suggested attire: fashionable and conservative business attire

- Italians (both men and women) generally wear dark trouser suits for diplomatic and business meetings. Women also wear skirt suits and business dresses. Sleeveless tops are generally not worn for daytime professional meetings without a jacket to cover.
- Attire for formal evening diplomatic events will be indicated on the invitation, and follows normal international standards (white tie, black tie, business dress, etc.).
- On cultural programs, sleeveless tops, shorts, and short skirts are considered inappropriate for visits to Catholic churches and most other religious sites in Italy.
- Italian "casual" wear is significantly more formal than the U.S. version, and could more accurately be compared to U.S. business dress in a "smart casual" workplace.

MEETING AND GREETING ETIQUETTE

- **As a guest, you will probably be introduced first. The most senior or eldest person present should also always be given special deference.**
- **Shake hands with everyone present when arriving and leaving, making eye contact.**
- Women and close male friends often greet each other by kissing on both cheeks—or rather, by brushing cheeks as they kiss the air. Start to the right.
- When greeting acquaintances in the morning or early afternoon, Italians use *Buongiorno* (Good day). In the late afternoon or evening, *Buonasera* (Good afternoon/evening) is

appropriate. Italians do not use *Buonanotte* (Good night) as a farewell. *Ci vediamo* [CHEE veh-dee-AH-mow] is an appropriate farewell for any time of day or night. *Ciao*, which can be used for greeting or farewell, is informal.

- **Forms of Address:** Do not use first names unless you are invited to. Always use your counterpart's personal title in spoken and written forms of address.

DINING

- Outside hotels catering to foreign guests, Italian breakfasts are light and informal, based around coffee, pastries, and fruit.
- Italian lunches and dinners generally feature multiple courses. *Antipasti*, or appetizers, are followed by a first course of pasta, risotto, or soup. The second course usually centers on meat or fish. Dessert is light and often fruit-based. The meal is followed by espresso, or *caff  *. (*Cappucino* is served only at breakfast, and should not be requested.)
- At lunch and dinner, the only beverages generally served are wine and water. You may be offered a choice of still or sparkling water. After-dinner drinks may also be served; these are usually sweet or bitter liqueurs, of which the guest may be offered a choice.
- At formal lunches and dinners, remain standing until invited to sit down.
- **Toasts:** The host gives the first toast. An honored guest should return the toast later in the meal. The most common toast is "Cin-Cin" [CHIN-CHIN]. Italians do not usually clink their glasses, although they do make eye contact while raising and tilting the glass.
- To eat pasta, use the side of your bowl to twirl pasta around the tines of your fork before bringing the small rolled parcel of pasta to your mouth.
- Bread traditionally placed to the side of the plate, on the table. Butter is often not served. Olive oil may be served in its place, but may not be. Avoid adding salt or pepper to your food; this suggests that you think the dish is bland, and can be taken as an insult.
- Avoid requesting grated cheese (such as *parmigiano*) for fish dishes. Italians will serve cheese alongside dishes with which it pairs.
- An *aperitivo* is a standing cocktail reception, usually in the late afternoon or early evening, at which light snacks are served. An *apericena* is a similar event with more substantial food, which is meant to supplement a light dinner or replace dinner altogether. Italian food is highly regional and depends on local produce. Foods for which Italy is internationally famous are often only available in a specific geographic area. Italians are very appreciative of foreign guests who understand this and seek out local specialties.
- Table manners are Continental:
 - The fork is held in the left hand and the knife in the right while eating
 - The fork is held tines down
 - If you have not finished eating, cross your knife and fork on your plate with the fork over the knife
 - Indicate you have finished eating by laying your knife and fork parallel across the right side of your plate.

GESTURES AND BODY LANGUAGE:

- **In informal social and family settings, many Italians use a wide vocabulary of gestures to "talk with their hands." This is much less common in Italian professional interactions with foreign guests.**

TABOOS (considered rude and impolite):

- **Conversation about intimate family details, individual income or salary, personal religious views, or the Catholic Church.**
- **Questions or jokes about the Italian Mafia or other organized crime groups; jokes about Italian corruption, inefficiency, or other negative stereotypes.**
- **Comparisons (positive or negative) between Italian cuisine and Italian-American cuisine.**

WEATHER GUIDANCE

- The average high temperature for Sicily in May is 67°F.
- The average low temperature for Sicily in May is 53°F.

The average precipitation for Sicily in May is 0.55 inches.